

SCHOOL FACILITIES INITIATIVE TASK FORCE SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES
THURSDAY, JULY 11, 2013 – 6:30 P.M.
TOWN HALL ANNEX, COMMUNITY ROOM 1

I. ROLL CALL

Present: Ambroise, Beaulieu, Denno, Greenleaf, Heller, Koehler, Semancik, Trejo,
Volkmann (7:20 p.m.), Watson (7:30 p.m.), Zod
Ex Officio: Somers
Staff: Oefinger, Schneider, McKenna, Robarge
Consultant: Mike Zuba, Ali Church, Tom Jokubaitis

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – June 27, 2013

A motion was made by Ambroise, seconded by Semancik, to approve the minutes of June 27, 2013 as written.

The motion carried with one abstention (Ambroise).

III. PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

Sean McKenna, Interim Superintendent of Schools, provided an overview of the roll of Administration as a liaison with the Board of Education in this process.

There will be a Board of Education meeting on July 22nd to discuss this process.

IV. ITEMS OF BUSINESS

a. Consultant Presentation on 3 Potential Courses of Actions

Mr. Zuba distributed two handouts entitled “Options” and “Potential Sites.” He reviewed school capacity and school size comparisons with other districts in Groton’s DRG (District Reference Group - a State nomenclature for comparing districts based on socio-economic and other factors). Of the districts that Mr. Zuba could get data for, Groton has the smallest middle school square footages for 6-8 middle schools and 7-8 middle schools, although enrollments are average.

Mr. Zuba presented three options for action that the task force can consider.

Option 1: One Middle School

Build a new middle school to serve the entire community. Renovate Cutler and West Side as PreK-5 elementary schools. Close Claude Chester, Pleasant Valley, and S. B. Butler.

Option 2: Two Middle Schools

Build a new middle school on the Kolnaski site, renovate Cutler as a new middle school, renovate West Side as a new PreK-5 elementary school, build a new elementary school on the east side of Town, close Claude Chester and S. B. Butler, and take the portable classrooms offline at Charles Barnum, Mary Morrison, and Pleasant Valley.

Mr. Zuba clarified that there may be other options such as a potential Option 2A, where in addition to building a new eastside elementary school the previously planned four classrooms are built at Northeast in order to close Pleasant Valley.

Option 3: Two Middle Schools, New Elementary Schools

Maintain Cutler and West Side as middle schools, fund capital improvements to them, close Claude Chester, Pleasant Valley, and S. B. Butler, build two new 550-600 student elementary schools (one on the east side of Town and one on the west side of Town).

b. Break-Out Groups to Develop Additional Courses of Action

The Task Force broke into three groups to further discuss the merits of each of the presented options. The groups reassembled to discuss and present their small group summaries.

Option 1:

Group 1

Pro:

- Geographically balanced (shared sacrifice)
- Solves problem of renovating middle schools
- More bang for buck, probably least expensive option
- Racial balancing at the middle school level

Con:

- No plan for closed schools — taxpayers will not appreciate that, they are community based facilities, they have mostly walkers
- Racial balance at elementary schools will not be fixed
- Transportation costs
- Racial balancing at the middle school level

Group 2

Pro:

- Claude Chester gone, turned into fields
- The transition is the best of the options - Where to put the kids while work is happening?
- Big schools can mean better band, sports
- Better facilities

Con:

- Kids can get lost at big schools
- Less options for band, sports?

Group 3

Pro:

- More bang for the buck
- Lower operating costs
- Opportunity to bring the parts of town together
- Better security

Con:

- Finding and agreeing on a location
- Marketing the idea to both parts of Town

Option 2:

Group 1

Pro:

- Gain on elementary community based
- More intimate school setting
- Both areas of Town would benefit from new schools

Con:

- Probably most expensive
- Takes middle school away
- Busing is more expensive
- Don't know the location of new elementary school
- Almost building $\frac{3}{4}$ new schools
- No clean feeder to middle school
- Kolnaski may not be a good site
- Regional issues with elementary schools

Group 2

Pro:

- Equity all over Town (everyone gets some)

Con:

- Transition hard (what to do in short term)
- Keeps Pleasant Valley
- Fitch Middle?
- Portables?

Group 3

Pro:

- Easier sell

- Equity
- Intimate
- Does not upset the “cart”

Con:

- Higher cost of operation
- Busing costs
- Building three schools
- No clear feeder pattern
- Is Kolnaski a good site?
- Regional Issues
- Racial balance not addressed

Option 3:

Group 1

Pro:

- Might be cheaper for middle schools

Con:

- Not getting modernized middle school
- Still closing three schools

Group 2

Pro:

- Popular status quo
- Builds new schools before students have to move (good transition)

Con:

- Not much for middle schools

Group 3

Pro:

- All new elementary schools

Con:

- No thoughts for future
- Racial balance

Mr. Zuba reiterated that there may be other options such as an Option 2A, where instead of building a new eastside elementary school, the planned classrooms are built at Northeast.

The group broke into the smaller groups to develop options that were not already presented. These options will be further studied by the consultant and presented at the next meeting.

Option 4:

- 1 middle school
 - Students stay in current schools while the new school is constructed
- Renovate middle schools for elementary sister schools PreK-2/3-5: Kolnaski/West Side and Barnum/Mary Morrisson
 - Schools are walkable
- Northeast and Cutler either stay PreK-5, or become sister schools depending on demographics
- Unused buildings turned over to the Town for resale
- Fitch becomes Central Offices and Parks and Rec Offices
- S. B. Butler, Claude Chester, and Administration Building taken down, used as fields

Option 5:

- Build 2 new middle schools
 - Will be an easier transition and easier sell to the community
- Renovate Cutler and West Side as PreK- 5
 - Better sell to community
 - Keeps military kids together
- Close Pleasant Valley, S. B. Butler, and Claude Chester

Option 6:

- Middle schools go to 5-8 (elementary schools go to PreK-4)
- 2 middle schools, 700 students each
- 4-5 elementary schools (as needed)
 - If 5 are needed, Pleasant Valley would eventually have to be replaced
 - PreK at every school

Option 7:

- Middle school goes to 5-8 (elementary schools go to PreK-4)
- 1 middle school, with 5/6 and 7/8 wings, sharing core facilities
- 4-5 elementary schools (as needed)
 - If 5 are needed, Pleasant Valley would eventually have to be replaced
 - PreK at every school

Discussion on siting was deferred to the next meeting.

V. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 8:43 p.m.